DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 024 685 TE 000 935

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From Machiavelli to Martians: The Challenge of Department Chairmanship.
Pub Date Apr 68
Note-8p.
Journal Cit-North Carolina English Teacher; v25 n3 p4-11 April 1968
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.50
Descriptors-*Administrative Personnel, *Administrator Responsibility, *Department Directors (School), Educational Administration, *English Instruction, *Faculty Promotion, Secondary School Teachers, Teacher Attitudes, Teacher Improvement, Teacher Placement, Teacher Recruitment, Teacher Responsibility, Teacher Salaries, Teacher Supervision, Teacher Workshops, Teaching Load

The duties, problems, compensation, and selection procedures of department chairmen in secondary schools need to be clarified. Present duties of an English department chairman include developing an educational philosophy and curriculum for the department; suggesting materials and teaching methods; protecting teacher welfare; working with all teachers, including student teachers and substitutes; developing and encouraging participation in inservice training programs; and dealing with the public. Ideally, according to recommendations gleaned from surveys and journals, the chairman of any high school English department should be chosen by the principal on the basis of leadership skills, should remain in the position long enough to become familiar with it, and should be granted a reduced teaching load or moderate financial benefits. Specifically, North Carolina department chairmen have requested guidelines for the selection, responsibility, authority, and compensation of department chairmen; an up-to-date curriculum guide; reasonable financial compensation; and improved communication among chairmen. (JS)

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From Machiavelli To Martians: The Challenge Of Department Chairmanship

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Chairmanship of any high school department is currently an important, influential, controversial, and less than enviable position. Machiavelli in *The Prince* very aptly surmised long ago that "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things." Necessity here—as in many cases today—has become the mother of intention, then invention, then contention.

For decades our secondary departments were run haphazardly by the individual teachers within them. Early administrative attempts to force organization frequently resulted in a chairman who served only as custodian to distribute books and supplies. English teachers with strength in required courses and thus in number of teachers involved with a bulk of curriculum have been among the first to recognize the potential of depart-

mental organization both for division of responsibilities and for curricular coordination.

Common sense dictates that the talents and energies of any group of subject-area teachers need leadership to focus their various efforts toward similar goals. Stability itself requires a constant figure amid mobile administrators and faculty — someone to provide continuity, pattern, structure; someone who knows the nature of the community, understands its growth and change; someone who realizes the possibilities for genuine service to the present and future generations served by a particular school.

As with Lewis Carroll's Walrus in *Alice's Adventures,* "The time has come to think of many things . . . ." The preceding plus consolidation practices leading to larger schools, increasing complexity of curriculum possibilities, and concern with providing more adequately for the various present and future needs of pupils have pressured to make the active secondary department head an academic necessity!

"An enigma . . . (for whom) a new role and image must be developed" was the feeling expressed toward the matter in 1966 by the national publication of secondary principals. With due respect to the immensity of principalship minus supervision and the impossibility of expertness in all subject areas, with the issue of departmental chairmen the predicament of traditional administration, reminds one a bit of the French revolutionist who said, "The mob is in the street. I must find out where they are going, for I am their leader."

Thus the purpose of this article is to give a *status report of selection procedures and compensation, possible duties, and persistent problems* for this phenomenon on the secondary scene — to clarify in part the role and image of the enigma. Existing practices can prove helpful in establishing guidelines to department chairmanship so this writer proposes to share with you constructive approaches gleaned from NASSP surveys, the English journals of Virginia and Wisconsin, and an enthusiastic discussion group at the 1967 annual fall meeting of the N. C. English Teachers Association.

Selection of department heads currently involves appointment by the administration, election by the English faculty, or a combination with faculty election from nominees of the faculty. An NASSP proposal with merit contends that "The principal should be the key person in the selection process. The

practice of electing department heads by members of the department is a questionable one, and is likely to reduce their status and effectiveness in the eyes of both teachers and administrators." Thus the procedure of nominees from one source with election from the other would seem the most democratic and desirable.

Length of service as department head varies from one year to five years to a permanent appointment. Some appointments specify one term only while in other cases one may serve as often as appointed or elected. Certainly length of service should be sufficient for one to acquire a grasp and facility with the position, and permanence should follow a period of probation. Training defined as specialized course work in areas pertinent to department chairmanship or competent experience in a similar past position frequently serve as bases for selection. However, the *Bulletin of NASSP* rates numerous criteria for selection as to their validity in the following manner: "Leadership is the most important single characteristic of effective department heads. Traits of superior teaching ability, knowledge and ability in curriculum development, willingness to work, and mastery of subject matter are of second importance. Least important are seniority, popularity, and graduate study."

Compensation, when allocated, for serving as a department head ranges from either reduced teaching load and/or financial supplement to release from student activity responsibilities. Dr. Baird Shuman contends wisely in the *Virginia English Bulletin* that "A chairman should, according to the size of his department, be expected to teach no more than a three-quarters teaching load and no less than a one-quarter teaching load. He should not lose touch with the classroom and with the students."

Further, to support this point of view, Dr. Shuman explained that " . . . princely salary emoluments have a deleterious effect in some ways. There is always the danger that the person seeking such a position is doing so more for the money than out of a real conviction that of those available he can best handle the job." His very reasonable solution to this problem is for " . . . a chairman to receive his regular monthly salary plus two-three additional months at the same rate . . . (with the expectation that he) work on curriculum planning during the summer and . . . return to school to take appropriate courses which would enhance his value as chairman."

Surveys reveal a preponderous range of services anticipated

and performed by English department chairman. At the sacrifice of literary style for quantity of ideas, possible duties follow in a concise listing with some semblance of order in preference and importance.

Developing in himself and jointly with teachers under his direction a philosophy and methods of education which will best serve the needs of pupils who pass through his school.

Formulating jointly with teachers a sequential and cumulative body of curriculum to be taught at each grade level—still retaining individual creativeness in each English teacher.

Aiding in coordination and revision of content and sequence in both existing curriculum of the department and at levels below and above high school.

Planning schedules—assigning best teacher in terms of experience, interest, temperament for various types of classes—capitalizing on strengths and specialized training.

Serving as a knowledgeable, observing, approachable person who tactfully and helpfully suggests practices, procedures, materials to colleagues.

Assuring and arranging reasonable class schedules, class enrollments, adequate preparation time, and delegation of extra-class responsibilities.

Serving jointly with principal or supervisors in evaluating and encouraging teacher competence and in protecting teacher welfare.

Aiding in the recruitment and selection of English teachers for the faculty who are in touch with the needs and interests of the younger generation.

Orienting new and substitute teachers to the department through policy manuals, curriculum guides, syllabi, etc.

Encouraging and arranging for teachers in the department to participate in appropriate institutes, regional and national conferences or projects in English Curriculum.

Assessing needs and procuring inservice workshops, extension courses, institutes for teachers in his department through nearby colleges or district authorities.

Securing consultants on curriculum trends and for problem areas in his departmental program.

Arranging for teachers to visit other English classes in his own school, other schools, other levels of instruction — with provision for payment of substitute.

Informing parents, community, and public about status and trends in the teaching of English through P.T.A. programs, reports to the board of education, mass media, and printed bulletins.

Establishing cooperative policy and securing definite aid from other academic teachers in holding high standards for language arts in all courses.

Accepting responsibility and authority for screening of questionable practices or subject matter which requires scrutiny before approval.

Formulating written procedures for handling complaints about books assigned or possible censorship in any area of the language arts.

Initiating and maintaining an English Materials Center to house a selective professional library, sample texts and teaching aids collection, file of resource units, file of semester or yearly exams, A-V equipment—with workspace for teachers.

Encouraging and expediting English classroom libraries with selected books, magazines, and paperbacks which are available to other teachers when needed from a central index in the Materials Center.

Requisitioning supplies for the English Department—quantity, quality, sources, distribution, policies.

Making final decisions about textbooks to adopt, supplementary and A-V materials to purchase — upon requests and recommendations from department members.

In departments of fifteen or more teachers — appointing and counseling with a steering committee of grade representatives from each level concerned with books, materials, and curricular matters — common preparation periods with released time for meetings.

Planning and directing regularly scheduled, profitable,

professional meetings of the English faculty through the year that result in tangible, useful products such as integrated theme units of a resource nature on various levels of difficulty.

Arranging for part-time or full-time professional clerical help for the English department — as well as reliable laymen to assume non-teaching duties.

Deciding criteria for ability or other types of grouping within program.

Assisting in placement of student-teachers within department and assuring varied and necessary field experiences for them.

Attending "professional growth" meetings with other local or state English department heads to share ideas and solutions to problems.

Presiding, of course, at departmental meetings and preparing written reports of achievements and activities in the preceding for administration.

Both research and comments from the fall NCETA discussion group rank as a major problem *released, planning time* for a department head to function meaningfully. When time is provided, frequently schedules of English teachers are not coordinated for parallel released time to permit planning sessions during the school day. One lady at the fall meeting wryly commented that her principal seemed to think an English department should operate by telepathy or osmosis.

Most English department heads would welcome a clear-cut administrative policy as to what is expected and the authority granted the position as well as an organized opportunity for coordination with other department heads on matters of mutual concern. Much of the lack of support and understanding from other faculty stems from this lack of policy and orientation to the functions, responsibilities, procedures, and authority that chairmanship should involve. Thus extra pay and committee assignments can become needlessly peevish matters.

Other problems of department heads include lack of genuine concern, understanding, and encouragement from administration in matters of curriculum improvement. A prime example here is that of the English head who recently made a specific request for text materials more appropriate to a class of slow learners

to be told nebulously that book orders for next year had been made and to retype the list would be too time consuming. Such apathy and ambiguity toward the position limit prestige and status as well as financial or schedule compensations.

Among my promises to keep has been tucked away a pledge to the ten English Department Heads present at the November 4, 1967, NCETA meeting that their recommendations to improve performance, status, and solve problems in this matter would be spread to minds other than their own. Those active representatives from school systems including Raleigh, Watauga, Lexington, and Wilkesboro outlined the following five proposals as essential to a "new role and image" for department chairmen in N. C. secondary schools:

(1) That the N. C. Department of Public Instruction provide appropriate, printed guidelines as to the selection, functions, responsibilities, authority, and compensation of secondary department heads — guidelines helpful to administration, heads, and other faculty.

(2) That the N. C. Department of Public Instruction provide the desperately needed final edition of an up-to-date curriculum guide which would aid in establishing a developmental scope and sequence with continuity in Language Arts from grades 7-12.

(3) That the N. C. Department of Public Instruction establish a flexible salary schedule which would compensate heads in proportion to number of faculty in a given department — in the same fashion as principals are now compensated according to number of teachers under their direction.

(4) That supervisory and special personnel from local administrative offices make clear their range of services available for department heads and faculty members and then *provide* these definite, helpful services especially in the areas of curriculum revision and instructional materials.

(5) That provisions be made for closer communication of English department heads to share valuable information and experiences for the general improvement of all English or other departments concerned.

May the "powers that be" give serious consideration to these requests made in personal sincerity and professional dedication

by N. C. educators who are serving directly in the position concerned! The trite story about the little green Martian who approached various earth objects, including gasoline tanks and parking meters, with the command "Take me to your leader" is fast becoming a situation of demand in the complicated secondary school. Our space friends who arrive in the twenty-first century may well find a hardy group of leaders who perhaps first gathered their resources to meet an academic challenge in the 1960's.

If your school needs a *first* English Department Chairman, a more effective one than you now have, or if *you* have just been elected English Department Chairman — take heart! You can help now to achieve the "new role and image" through pioneering in leadership or through supporting and cooperating with other teachers so selected. The role envisioned is a far greater one than petty "snoopervision" or an empty prestigious title. The qualified, informed, competent department head is in truth a vice-principal. That, gentlemen, is the future and fate of your enigma.

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RECOMMENDED REFERENCE

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